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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA OUTLINES NEW BURUNDI PEACE PLAN

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: At a February 22-23 South African Government (SAG)-sponsored seminar, Facilitator Charles Nqakula and Special Envoy Kingsley Mamabolo outlined SAG plans to reinvigorate its Burundi mediation through creation of a "Political Directorate" that would include the Government of Burundi (GOB) and Palipehutu-FNL (FNL), as well as Uganda, Tanzania, the EU, UN, and AU. The Bujumbura-based Political Directorate would serve as a "listening forum" to address contentious issues between the GOB and FNL, but would not/not be used to reopen existing agreements. The SAG plan sets an ambitious timetable for the return of the FNL to Bujumbura (April/May 2008), for FNL DDR (beginning May 2008), for the withdrawal of South African/AU troops (June 2008), and for inclusion of the FNL in key positions in the government (by the end of 2008, consistent with the SAG's one year AU mandate extension). Conference participants reaffirmed their strong support for the SAG mediation in Burundi and agreed on a coordinated "checklist" of messages for the GOB and FNL. Nqakula and Mamabolo plan to travel to Dar es Salaam and Bujumbura in early March to seek the buy-in of the parties for the plan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The SAG Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) hosted a seminar for the "Group of Special Envoys for Burundi" February 22-23 in Cape Town. SAG Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Kingsley Mamabolo chaired the seminar, joined for two hours on February 22 by the Facilitator of the Burundi Peace Process, SAG Minister for Safety and Security Charles Nqakula. Others attendees included: African Union Special Representative in Burundi Ambassador Mamadou Bah; UN Executive Representative for Burundi Youssef Mahmoud; European Union Special Envoy for the African Great Lakes Region Roeland van de Geer; Belgium Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Jozef Smets; Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great

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Lakes Region Ambassador Liberata Mulamula; and representatives of the governments of Uganda, Tanzania,

Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and Canada. DAS James Swan represented the USG, joined by PolOff (notetaker).

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Strong Support for South African Facilitation  
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¶3. (SBU) The seminar participants expressed strong support for the South African-led Regional Initiative for Peace in Burundi, whose mandate has been extended to December 31, 2008. Facilitator Ngakula, S/E Mamabolo, and other South African participants reaffirmed the SAG commitment to the Burundi peace process, but noted that the patience of the SAG -- which has nearly 750 troops serving in Burundi as part of the African Union Special Task Force -- is not unlimited. Several participants noted the link between concluding the FNL peace process and the long-term economic development of Burundi.

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Programme of Action  
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¶4. (SBU) At the centerpiece of South Africa's "Programme of Action to Take Further the Burundi Peace Process" (emailed to AF, AF/C, and Embassy Bujumbura) is the creation of a "Political Directorate," which is intended to be a "listening forum" to resolve sensitive issues between the FNL and GOB. Both the FNL and GOB would sit on the Political Directorate, along with a representative of the South African Facilitation; the AU and UN Special Representatives; the Ambassadors of South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda; and an EU representative. The SAG initially proposed including a civil society representative on the Political Directorate, but reconsidered given concerns that sensitive information could

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leak. Instead, conference participants agreed to keep key stakeholders, including civil society and Parliament, briefed on developments. Ambassador Mulamula of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region made a plea to include her organization on the Political Directorate, a request that will be considered by the Facilitator.

¶5. (SBU) Seminar participants agreed that the Political Directorate will not/not be used to reopen previous agreements, nor will it replace the work of the Joint Verification Monitoring Mechanism (JVMM), which was created to oversee implementation of the September 2006 Ceasefire Agreement. The Ugandan representative and others stressed the narrow mandate of the Political Directorate, noting that the FNL might see its creation as an opportunity to reopen issues which had already been decided.

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Timetable  
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¶6. (SBU) In its proposed Programme of Action, the SAG detailed an ambitious timetable for concluding the FNL peace process:

-- February/March 2008: Discussions between the Political Directorate and FNL in Dar es Salaam, including preparations for the FNL to resume participation in the JVMM;

-- April 2008: Resumption of work of JVMM and Liaison Teams, including discussions on release of political prisoners;

-- May 2008: FNL leadership returns to Burundi; Political Directorate discusses inclusion of FNL into national institutions; prisoners released; beginning of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration for FNL combatants;

-- June 2008: FNL transforms into political party; Ceasefire

Agreement fully implemented; African Union Special Task Force withdraws; and

-- July - December 2008: Political Directorate monitors reintegration of FNL into state institutions and socio-economic life of country.

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Key Messages to Parties  
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17. (SBU) Conference participants separately agreed on "common messages" and "common understandings" on key political issues. These include:

-- The international community is impatient for progress, particularly for the FNL to return to Burundi; this impatience is growing as there is momentum on the FDLR and LRA peace processes elsewhere in the region;

-- FNL power-sharing demands may be conveyed to the Political Directorate, but must not re-open existing decisions contained in the Ceasefire Agreement or violate Burundi's Constitution or national laws; the GOB should show flexibility in giving the FNL a role in decision-making within these constraints;

-- The FNL concerns over its security on return to Burundi should be raised in the Political Directorate;

-- The FNL should drop its insistence on retaining "Palipehutu" in its name, as this violates the constitutional prohibition on "ethnic" party names;

-- The alleged FNL dissidents in camps should go through the GOB DDR process like other former combatants; the international community will continue to provide humanitarian

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aid to the FNL dissidents; as signatory of the Ceasefire Agreement with the GOB, Agathon Rwaso remains the recognized interlocutor representing the FNL;

-- FNL concerns over alleged political prisoners should be channeled through the agreed Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JVMM) and Joint Liaison Teams, and only taken up by the Political Directorate if there is a major impasse; and

-- The international community will not/not accede to FNL demands to pay debts it incurred to feed and lodge its still-mobilized combatants during the peace process; they may of course benefit from support upon entering the DDR process.

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Next Steps  
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18. (SBU) Minister Ngakula and S/E Mamabolo plan to travel to Dar es Salaam on March 1 to discuss the Programme of Action with the FNL, then to Bujumbura to meet with President Nkurunziza to seek his buy-in. Mamabolo has already briefed the two parties on the general outlines of the plan, but will use these meetings to secure their full understanding and cooperation. Post will follow-up with Mamabolo upon his return to get a readout from the trip and FNL/GOB reactions. The conference participants (termed by the SAG the "Group of Special Envoys for Burundi") agreed to meet again in May 2008, possibly in New York, to evaluate progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action and discuss next steps.

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Comment  
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¶9. (SBU) Following the breakdown of communications between the FNL and the South African Facilitation in late 2007, the SAG has reevaluated its policy and decided to take a fresh approach to the Burundi peace process. The creation of the Political Directorate is a significant new step, meant to facilitate GOB-FNL dialogue and reassure the FNL that its concerns will be heard. Through the creation of the Burundi special envoys group, the SAG is attempting to keep key regional and international players on the same page, and ensure that they deliver consistent messages to the two parties.

¶10. (SBU) The SAG greatly appreciated the high-level and active U.S. participation in the Burundi seminar. Post will continue to follow closely SAG policy toward Burundi and recommends continued USG-SAG dialogue on Great Lakes issues, an area where we share common objectives and interests.  
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